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ABSTRACT

The principles and practice of online learning in schools and classrooms were examined. The data sources used for the study were as follows: face-to-face and telephone interviews; several field visits; a review of the literature; online visits to courses, chat rooms, and threaded discussions; and e-mail exchanges. The future of online learning at for-profit, and not-for-profit institutions was found to be taking shape along the following lines: (1) virtual schools and colleges that exist wholly online and operate without campuses; (2) brick-and-mortar educational institutions where the number of courses delivered entirely online is growing but most courses are delivered in face-to-face classes; and (3) brick-and-mortar educational institutions where few courses are entirely online but increasing numbers of campus-based courses include World Wide Web-based features. The following issues related to online learning in all three types of institutions were considered: delivery systems; the nature of interaction; facilitating conversation; adapting to the new; responsibility for learning; the business of online education; focusing e-learning on careers; the legitimacy of online learning; controlling the learning process; redefining the educational institution; online courses across the gamut; and educational purposes in the Cyber Era. The analysis established that although online courses greatly improve access to education, they are not suited for all learners and all learning situations. (Contains 122 references.) (MN)

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